

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

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R 030945Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9388

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RANGOON 0861

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PFOR BM

SUBJ: OUTLOOK FOR STABILITY IN BURMA, 1975

REF: RANGOON 3532 OF 20 DECEMBER 1974

SUMMARY: IT NOW SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY THAT NE WIN WILL BE THROWN OUT OR CAUSED TO RESIGN IN THE YEAR AHEAD. WHILE THE ECONOMY CONTINUES TO STAGNATE, THE RICE OUTLOOK HAS IMPROVED, AND THIS IS CRUCIAL. THE REGIME'S PURPOSEFUL AND RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL ACTIONS AGAINST THE BCP AND ITS EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC SECURITY MACHINERY HAVE PROBABLY MORE THAN MADE UP FOR WHATEVER DAMAGE NE WIN'S PRESTIGE AMONG THE MILITARY MAY HAVE SUFFERED IN THE U THANT AFFAIR; AT ANY RATE NE WIN'S AUTHORITY OVER THE MILITARY DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE BEEN IMPAIRED. IF NE WIN NEVERTHELESS DID LEAVE THE SCENE IN THE NEXT YEAR OR SO, IT SEEMS PROBABLE THAT HE WOULD BE SUCCEEDED BY GENERAL SAN YU. END SUMMARY.

1. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE THREE MONTHS SINCE THE U THANT DISTURBANCES HAVE GIVEN US A MORE OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF NE WIN'S NEAR-TERM PROSPECTS FOR STABILITY. IN DECEMBER IT SEEMED PROBABLE THAT THERE WOULD BE FURTHER SERIOUS DISTURBANCES IN 1975, AND THAT THESE
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MIGHT EXCEED THE POWER OF NE WIN'S GOVERNMENT TO CONTROL, PAR-

TICULARLY SINCE THERE THEN SEEMED MORE LIKELIHOOD OF THE DISTURBANCES BECOMING GENERAL, RATHER THAN BEING LOCALIZED IN THE URBAN WORKING CLASSES OR THE INTELLECTUALS. WHILE NOTING THAT NE WIN RETAINED EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THE MILITARY, WE THOUGHT HIS INITIAL MISJUDGMENT OF THE U THANT MATTER MIGHT HAVE DAMAGED HIS PRESTIGE, CONCEIVABLY EVEN TO THE POINT OF WEAKENING HIS AUTHORITY OVER THE MILITARY. AND WE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE TO SPECULATE THAT THE DISTURBANCES HAD HEIGHTENED DISCONTENT WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES. RECENT TRENDS AND EVENTS HAVE PROVIDED GROUNDS FOR REVISING OUR ESTIMATE ON THESE KEY POINTS.

2. MOST CONCRETELY, THE LIKELIHOOD OF DISTURBANCES OVER RICE HAS BEEN GREATLY REDUCED, AT LEAST FOR 1975, BY THE GOVERNMENT'S SUCCESS IN COLLECTING MORE THAN ENOUGH RICE TO MEET DOMESTIC DEMAND FOR THE BALANCE OF THE YEAR. WITHOUT THE GOAD OF A RICE PROBLEM, WORKERS ARE NOT LIKELY TO TAKE TO THE STREETS, EVEN IF SOME CHANCE DEVELOPMENT WERE TO CAUSE PROTESTS BY OTHER ELEMENTS. THE UNIVERSITIES HAVE NOT YET REOPENED, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF INCIDENT WHEN THE STUDENTS ARE BACK ON CAMPUS CANNOT BE RULED OUT. HOWEVER, IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, A CLASH BETWEEN STUDENTS (OR OTHER GROUPS) AND THE AUTHORITIES WOULD PROBABLY BE CONTROLLABLE. ON THE PART OF THE DIVERSE ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN THE SEPARATE DISTURBANCES OF LAST JUNE AND DECEMBER THERE ARE STILL NO SIGNS OF ORGANIZATION, PROGRAMS, OR PLANS. MEANWHILE, THE GUB HAS TAKEN SOME STEPS TO IMPROVE ITS CAPABILITIES IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC ORDER.

3. NE WIN'S EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THE MILITARY, STILL KEY TO POWER IN BURMA, HAS NOT BEEN VISIBLY WEAKENED BY THE U THANT DISTURBANCES AND SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS, AND MAY ON BALANCE HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED. HIS CLAIM TO THE PERSONAL LOYALTIES OF INDIVIDUAL SOLDIERS CONTINUES, BASED IN PART ON NE WIN'S SELF-CULTIVATED IMAGE AS THE CREATOR OF BURMA'S ARMED FORCES, IN PART ON SUCH INTANGIBLES AS HIS REPUTATION FOR REMEMBERING NAMES AND FACES AND PERSONAL DETAILS OF MEN IN THE RANKS. HIS PERSONAL INTERVENTION IN THE PROMOTION AND PLACEMENT PROCESSES HAS RESULTED IN A SCATTERING OF PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE FORCES WHO ARE DIRECTLY BEHOLDEN TO HIM, WHILE HE HAS ELIMINATED OR ISOLATED POSSIBLE RIVALS IN HIS OWN PEER GROUP AND CAREFULLY KEPT IN BALANCE THOSE ON THE NEXT LOWER RUNGS OF THE LADDER. THESE FACTORS OF LONG

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STANDING HAVE PROBABLY BEEN REINFORCED BY CREDIT RECEIVED FOR SUCCESSES SINCE DECEMBER: NAMELY, HIS HANDLING OF THE AFTERMATH OF THE U THANT AFFAIR, ONCE THE INITIAL MISJUDGMENT WAS PAST; THE CLEANUP OF THE OLD BCP ELEMENTS IN THE PEGU YOMA, CULMINATING IN THE EXTERMINATION OF THAKINS ZIN AND CHIT; AND THE SERIES OF ACTIONS AGAINST THE BCP IN THE NORTHEAST.

4. NE WIN'S CLAIM ON THE LOYALTY OF THE MILITARY PRESUMABLY BOTH

LIMITS THE NUMBER OF THOSE WHO MIGHT WISH TO DISPOSE OF HIM AND ALSO MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR ANYONE WHO MIGHT NEVERTHELESS WANT TO PUT TOGETHER A COUP GROUP TO DO SO WITHOUT FEAR OF DISCLOSURE. THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY SOME CONCERNED BURMESE MIGHT WITH TO OVERTHROW NE WIN (E.G., DISSATISFACTION WITH THE STATE OF THE BURMESE ECONOMY OR POLITICAL CONDITIONS) BUT MOST ECONOMIC/ POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS PROBABLY APPLY WITH LEAST FORCE AMONG THE MILITARY, WHOSE POWER WOULD BE ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF A COUP. UNLESS ECONOMIC DETERIORATION THREATENS TO DENY THE MILITARY ESSENTIAL IMPORTS OF MATERIEL OR TO CUT INTO RICE RATIONS FOR MILITARY DEPENDENTS (NEITHER OF WHICH IS AT ALL LIKELY THIS YEAR), MILITARY BACKING FOR AN ECONOMICS-MOTIVATED COUP IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY.
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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

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CINCPAC HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RANGOON 0861

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

5. ALL THIS MAKES IT EVEN MORE UNLIKELY THAN IT APPEARED LAST DECEMBER THAT NE WIN WILL BE THROWN OUT OF POWER IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WE ARE THUS ALL THE MORE LED TO CONSIDER THE HYPOTHETICAL POSSIBILITY OF NE WIN'S DEATH OR "VOLUNTARY" WITHDRAWAL AS THE MAJOR POTENTIAL SOURCE OF GOVERNMENTAL CHANGE IN THE NEXT YEAR OR SO. OUR ESTIMATE OF THE PROBABILITY OF SUCH AN EVENT ALSO HAS BEEN REVISED DOWNWARD IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS. NE WINSND HIS REGIME HAVE GIVEN TANGIBLE SIGNS OF RESILIENCE AND VITALITY IN

THEIR ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE THE PUBLIC SECURITY MACHINERY, IN THEIR PURPOSEFUL EXPLOITATION OF THE RECENT MILITARY SUCCESSES TO IMPROVE THE GOVERNMENT'S IMAGE, AND IN OTHER GOVERNMENT ACTIONS. WE HAVE ALSO HAD A CTMPLE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO OBSERVE NE WIN AT CLOSE RANGE, AND THE IMPRESSION HE CONVEYS IS NOT ONE OF A MAN ON THE VERGE OF RESIGNATION. NOR IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT HE HAS ANY SIGNIFICANT HEALTH PROBLEMS.

6. IN SUM, THE PROBABILITY OF A CHANGE IN REGIME, AT LEAST IN THE NEXT YEAR, IS SMALL, AND WE HAVE NO PRESENT GROUNDS FOR ASSUMING THAT THE PROBABILITY WILL INCREASE MATERIALLY IN THE FOLLOWING YEAR, EXCEPT THAT NE WIN WILL BE A YEAR OLDER. NEVERTHELESS, ONE PARTY DICTATORSHIPS ARE PRONE TO SUCCESSION PROBLEMS, AND AT SOME POINT IN NE WIN'S AGING PROCESS, THE POSSIBILITY OF A "PRE-EMPTIVE" CONFIDENTIAL

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OR "SUCCESSION" COUP BY ONE OR ANOTHER RIVAL GROUP WITHIN THE REGIME WILL REQUIRE CAREFUL SCRUTINY. HOWEVER, THAT POINT HAS NOT YET BEEN REACHED.

7. IN THE EVENT OF NE WIN'S REMOVAL FROM THE SCENE, ESPECIALLY IF THE MANNER OF PM'S DEPARTURE ENABLES HIM TO INFLUENCE THE SUCCESSION, THE PROBABLE SUCCESSOR IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD BE GENERAL SAN YU. WHILE GENERAL TIN OO WOULD PLAY A KEY PART IN THE UNLIKELY EVENTUALITY OF A MILITARY COUP, IN ANY OTHER KIND OF CHANGE SAN YU'S STATUS AS HEIR APPARENT AND THE CONCERN OF NE WIN AND OTHERS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL FORM WOULD FAVOR SAN YU. IN ADDITION, THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF RECENT SIGNS OF A POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENT IN SAN YU'S POLITICAL POSITION, ALTHOUGH THE BALANCE COULD OF COURSE SHIFT IN FAVOR OF TIN OO OR SOME THIRD PARTY. A SAN YU REGIME WOULD PERPETUATE THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO, AND WOULD PROBABLY SIGNAL NO RADICAL CHANGE OF PACE IN THE GUB'S CAUTIOUS MOVEMENT TOWARD ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION. OSBORN

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